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Comments on the Soviet Policy Alternatives in the Wake of the Cuban Crisis

We agree with many of CIA's observations and in particular with the identification of considerations affecting the Soviet reaction to the Cuban crisis contained in the first third of the memorandum.

However, we differ with the presentation of probable Soviet policy decisions as being essentially a choice of two alternatives--a "hard" line devoted to arm race buildup or a "soft" line stressing disarmament, disarmament measures, and peaceful coexistence. We believe that Moscow will not choose between these two approaches, but will -- as it has in the past -- combine arms building with pursuit of its objectives through negotiation.

While the possibility of a major change in Soviet policy over a broad range of issues cannot be excluded, recent evidence suggests that Soviet policy on major issues will not be marked by radically new departures. The Cuban crisis appears to have added weight to the arguments on both sides of unsettled questions in Soviet policy, but without shifting the pre-existing equilibrium. It may well turn out that in the long run the principal effect of the Cuban crisis will have been to make difficult decisions even more difficult and thus add to the Soviet leadership's propensity to compromise, adopt half-measures and avoid taking radical decisions.

Because we do not view Soviet policy alternatives as a single hard-soft continuum, we disagree with the estimate, in paragraph IV, that an assertive US policy would unquestionably impel Moscow toward a "hard" line. Obviously an aggressive US policy threatening Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe, for example, would have that effect, and in the extreme case might even cause the Soviet leaders to conclude that they had no alternative but to launch a pre-emptive strike. However, mere displays of assertiveness on the part of the West could well have the opposite effect, causing the Soviets to exert greater efforts in seeking negotiations and agreements with the West. We

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Walter Clark, Director of the FBI, has been confirmed on
October 10, 1964. The FBI has been advised that, despite
his appointment, he will continue to be available for
in response to a policy which is being studied being pro-
posed.

IMR has a study on Service post-John policy in preparation.

Roger Hillman

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Comments on CIA Memorandum, "Soviet Policy in the Aftermath of Cuban Crisis" (29 November, 1962)

We agree with many of CIA's observations and in particular with the description of considerations affecting the Soviet reaction to the Cuban crisis contained in the first third of the memorandum.

However, we differ with the presentation of probable Soviet policy decisions as being essentially a choice of two alternatives -- a "hard" line devoted to an arms buildup or a "soft" line stressing negotiation, disarmament measures and peaceful coexistence. We believe that Moscow will not choose between these two approaches, but will -- as it has in the past -- combine arms building with pursuit of its objectives through negotiation.

While the possibility of a major change in Soviet policy over a broad range of issues cannot be excluded, recent evidence suggests that Soviet policy on major issues will not be marked by radically new departures. The Cuban crisis appears to have added weight to the arguments on both sides of unsettled questions in Soviet policy, but without shifting the pre-existing equilibrium. It may well turn out that in the long run the principal effect of the Cuban crisis will have been to make difficult decisions even more difficult and thus add to the Soviet leadership's propensity to temporize, adopt half-measures and avoid taking radical decisions.

Because we do not view Soviet policy alternatives as a single hard-soft dichotomy, we disagree with the estimate, in paragraph 17, that an assertive US policy would unquestionably impel Khrushchev toward a "hard" line. Obviously an aggressive US policy (demanding Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe, for example) would have that effect, and in the extreme case might even drive the Soviet leaders to conclude that they had no alternative but to launch a pre-emptive strike. However, more moderate displays of assertiveness on the part of the West could well have the opposite effect, causing the Soviets to exert greater efforts in seeking negotiations and agreements with the West. We

believe that the lesson of the passing of Soviet deadlines on Berlin and the withdrawal of missiles from Cuba is that, despite his sensitivity to appearing weak, Khrushchev will show prudence in response to a policy which is assertive without being provocative.

INR has a Study on Soviet post-Cuba policy in preparation

Roger Hilsman